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Alfred Herscovitch

THE SELKIRK SETTLEMENT ON THE RED RIVER

by

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Red River Reminiscences
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"MANITOBA MEMORIES"

"RED RIVER REMINISCENCES AND POEMS"

VICTORIA, BRITISH COLUMBIA"







LORD SELKIRK

*From a painting ascribed to Raeburn at St. Mary's Isle,
Scotland.*

"I never knew in my life a man of a more generous and disinterested disposition than Selkirk, or one whose talents and perseverance were better fitted to bring great and national schemes to successful conclusion."

—SIR WALTER SCOT T.

THE LORD SELKIRK SETTLEMENT ON THE RED RIVER

*The intrepid spirit of the pioneers
Still shakes the pulse throughout
the sounding years.*

The foregoing lines are particularly applicable to that heroic band of Highlanders who pioneered on the banks of the Red in the years 1812, 1813 and 1815.

Three times were their homes burned over their heads, once in the old land, when they were dispossessed of their original holdings, and twice on the new soil, when after attack and massacre at the hands of the agents of the Northwest Company, they were driven from their holdings, followed by the most dreadful imprecations and threats that, should they attempt to return, every man, woman and child would be put to the same brutal death that had been meted out to their followers. Yet by their indomitable courage and perseverance, they returned again and yet again to the scene of their disaster, to hold for the British Empire the gateway to the vast domain of Western Canada.

*The intrepid spirit of the pioneers
Still 'shakes the pulse throughout
the sounding years.*

It was their presence at a point some seventy miles south of where the City of Winnipeg now stands that limited the northern boundary of the United States to the 49th parallel of latitude.

At the commencement of the last century, when European nations were reaching out to acquire lands in the new hemisphere, international law decreed that a nation represented by bona fide farmers, deriving their living direct from the soil, could claim priority of occupancy over a nation represented by transient traders only. It was the

application of this law that obliged Great Britain to withdraw her claims to those portions of Washington and Oregon in which the Hudson's Bay Company had established trading posts, and over which the British flag had flown for many years.

Had not the Selkirk colonists been forced through an unforeseen contingency to migrate yearly to a point some seventy miles south of their original location, in order to keep in touch with their much-needed supplies of buffalo meat, it is almost a certainty that that strip of territory, seventy miles in depth and extending from the Great Lakes to the Pacific Ocean, would have passed into the hands of the Americans. How serious would have been the resultant loss to Canada is realized when we observe that this strip contains some of the finest agricultural land on the face of the globe, as well as many desirable towns and villages. Indeed the site of Vancouver itself would have been included, as it lies only some sixty miles north of the international boundary. The danger to Canadian interests, however, would not have rested there as, should our American cousins have established themselves that far north on the coast line, it is quite probable that possession of Vancouver Island would have been sought in somewhat the same forcible manner as that by which San Juan Island, adjoining it, was acquired, as it is a well established fact that their purchase of Alaska was made with a view to linking it up with their Western states under their rights as successors to the Spanish claim of discovery. In the above eventuality, the loss to Canada of access to the Pacific Ocean would have caused a damage too irreparable for conception.

To get our subject in proper perspective, it will be necessary to note the two main factors that influenced Lord Selkirk in his philanthropic and patriotic enterprise.

The beginning of the last century witnessed the first shifting of population from the rural to the urban centres, brought about by the increased speed and comfort of travel, due to ~~the invention of the locomotive steam engine~~, and which ~~improvement~~ increasing with the speed and facility

improved means of living methods

of our modern "machine age," is directly responsible for the segregation of our population in huge city centres, and for our present economic difficulties.

Prior to that period, the tenant farmers in Great Britain, holding their leasehold rights from generation to generation, dealt directly with their lairds or squires, as the case might appertain to Scotland or England. They looked up to them as the heads of their clans or communities and as their natural protectors, as which indeed they were proud to be known. This happy condition of affairs was speedily terminated by the removal of the wealthy landowners to enjoy the advantages and attractions of city life. Here, the only return they could make for the entertainment afforded them by their wealthy and socially influential city friends was by way of those popular week-end hunting and fishing parties, of which we read so continuously in novels of the Victorian era. These naturally required fairly large tracts of sparsely settled land. At that time also, owing to the invention of more modern machinery, the woolen industry in Great Britain received a great impetus. For the dual purposes then of creating deer parks or sheep ranches, as pleasure or profit dictated, the great landowners commenced to clear the tenants from off the less profitable lands.

It is with a feeling of extreme distaste that the writer of this article has to acknowledge that the wealthy Countess of Sutherland was one of the most culpable of these avaricious landholders. She was possessed of extensive estates in Ross-shire, in the north of Scotland. Following the usual custom of the times, she placed the management of her estates in the hands of a very hard-hearted bailiff. The remuneration of these bailiffs naturally depended largely on their ability to extract the last farthing possible from the unfortunate tenantry. The latter, inheriting the leasehold rights from generation to generation, as already stated, considered that they had some rights in the matter, and in many instances made forcible resistance to eviction. Open rebellion, indeed, broke out in many districts, but the bailiffs, having the power of the law on their side, were ruthless and made short work of the matter. "Wher-

ever resistance was shewn, the homes and byres of the tenants were burned down to prevent re-occupancy. Some three thousand tenants were evicted in this manner. In two parishes in Sutherlandshire alone a single sheep ranch displaced a hundred tenants. We can scarcely picture the misery of these unfortunate people, set out on the bleak, barren moorlands of Northern Scotland, surrounded by their wives and children, and totally unprepared to make their living in any other manner than that to which they had been accustomed. The situation was still further aggravated by the fact that at that identical time many of their brothers and sons were on the Continent fighting the cause of the Empire in the struggle against the powerful Napoleon Bonaparte.

Such a condition of affairs could not but appeal to a man of the humane instincts of Thomas Douglas, the Fifth Earl of Selkirk. Douglas was a scion of the noble clan of the Douglasses, noted for their valour as far back as the time of the crusades. Some of us can remember back to a story told in the early Canadian school readers of how the head of the Douglas clan was entrusted with the embalmed heart of his deceased monarch, Robert the Bruce, which was contained in a silver casket and which he was commissioned to carry to the Holy Land for interment in a sepulchre there, and how, finding himself opposed by an overwhelming force of Saracens, he had cast the casket far into the ranks of his enemies, and how, after a terrible struggle, his dead body was found surrounded by numerous corpses of the enemy whom he had slain, but with the casket again clasped to his bosom. Selkirk was a worthy descendant of that noble house. He was described as fully a hundred years in advance of his contemporaries, and history has fully borne out this magnificent eulogy.

During his university career he formed close friendships with such notables as Jeffrey, Clark, Ferguson and Sir Walter Scott. As a result of the latter friendship is to be noted the beautiful encomiums paid to the head of the Douglas house in Scott's lovely poem, "The Lady of the Lake." Douglas completed his education under

the learned Lord Hamilton. He made the "grande tour" of Europe, without which no young gentleman of his age was supposed to have completed his education.

During his parliamentary career he obtained a well-informed and well-balanced outlook on public affairs. He was the author of a number of important books on national defence, and immigration, and one in particular on Indian reserves, which is in use as a textbook to the present day. He approached the British cabinet with various plans looking to the amelioration of the overcrowded conditions in the old lands by way of assisted immigration to the colonies offering assistance from his own ample means; but the Cabinet, engrossed with the cares of the great Napoleonic struggle, paid scant attention to his representations. He then, out of his own resources, undertook the transfer of some eight hundred Highlanders from Argyllshire to Prince Edward Island. This was one of the most successful colonization enterprises undertaken from Great Britain. The colony developed into one of the most noted literary centres in America and has provided more public men of note, per capita, than any other community of which we can find record. A second venture in the Welland district in Western Ontario did not bring such good results. The district was isolated, the settlers became discouraged, it was ravished by American forces during the war of 1812 and finally moved piecemeal into the more thickly settled parts of the province.

During a sojourn of several months in the years 1803 and 1804 in the United States, Selkirk became aware of what proved to be the second factor in influencing him to found a settlement in Western Canada. Urged on by the influx of settlers from the Eastern shores, the farmers of the great central states, selling their lands at what were then greatly remunerative prices, commenced a trek in a northwesterly direction in search of cheap virgin soil. This developed into the greatest migratory movement known in the history of the human race. In one season alone some two hundred thousand persons joined the canvas-covered caravans, and the movement was never stayed until it had swept over all of the northwestern

states, reaching the Pacific Coast by way of Washington and Oregon. Selkirk clearly saw, and he was the only man of his time to realize that if some definite step was not taken to offset this movement, there would be a great probability of all Northwestern America being overrun by our neighbors to the south, and of what is now Western Canada falling under the control of the American Union.

He was a director in the Hudson's Bay Company and, as such, was acquainted with the amazing fertility of the Red River Valley. He further chose this location as the most suitable strategic position for his purpose as it is the natural point of entry to the vast territory he wished to retain to British influence.

In the first instance he approached his fellow directors in the Hudson's Bay Company, asking them for a grant of land for his purpose, but they, being fearful that an agricultural settlement would expend to the detriment of the lucrative fur trade, made violent opposition to his proposals. He then, by the use of his own great wealth and that of his family connections, bought up a controlling interest in the company, had himself made president and then practically forced his fellow directors to sell him a tract of land comprising 116,000 square miles, consisting of what are now parts of Manitoba, North Dakota and Minnesota. He then commenced the insertion of advertisements in newspapers in the old land, offering inducements to settlers suited to his purpose.

At that time there was also operating in Western Canada another fur company other than the Hudson's Bay Company, known as the Northwest Company, being composed of an amalgamation of all the independent fur companies other than the Hudson's Bay, operating west of the Great Lakes. This company was controlled by a number of shrewd Scottish financiers located in Montreal. At no time did they attempt to dispute the legal rights of the older company to the governmental control of the country. The charter of the Hudson's Bay Company granted them the exclusive trading privileges and the governance of the Hudson Bay and the rivers, lakes and territories contiguous to same. By no stretch of imagination,

of course, could lands lying as far distant as the Mackenzie River basin or Washington or Oregon be construed as lands leading out of the Hudson Bay, but the Hudson's Bay Company had actually exercised whatever governmental control there was over these lands. The directors of the Northwest Company were shrewd enough to realize that if they entered into a legal contest to dispute the rights of the older company, that the latter was probably influential enough to bring pressure to bear on the British parliament to confirm them in the exercise of their assumed rights. Ignoring then the legal aspect of the case, they, with great energy, matched resources with the older company, establishing trading posts and forts on all the inland lakes and rivers as far distant as the Mackenzie River and Oregon. Indeed one of their explorers, Mackenzie, was the first white man to reach the Pacific coast by way of a northern route.

The strife developed into what was known as the "Pemican War." Trading posts and forts were captured and plundered and a number of men killed on either side.

Although the two companies were at war with each other, their directors followed similar lines in their efforts to discredit Lord Selkirk's project, filling Old Country papers with letters describing the country as a barren waste adjoining the Arctic circle, where cereals could not be grown, and where white men could not exist except in fortified posts such as used by fur traders, otherwise they would fall victims to the stake or the scalping knife of the natives, who were described as cannibals of an unusually ferocious nature.

Tales of this nature appear incredible of belief in our present day knowledge of the district intended for settlement, but we must remember the lack of general education and travel at the date in which they were used. How credible the minds of the more ignorant were is illustrated by a tale told to the writer by his grandfather, to the truth of which he absolutely affirmed.

He related how one of the settlers on returning home was overwhelmed with ridicule on describing the amaz-

ing fertility of the fresh virgin soil and the mildness of the climate. Taking offence at the scoffing, he then stated that he had been simply attempting to see what they could be made to believe, and that in reality the very opposite of what he had been saying was true; that the Winters were so cold that workmen in the woods could not hear their comrades shouting to them, as the sounds froze in the thick frosty air, but as the Winter wore away, the woods were filled with the most amazing hubbub as the sounds melted out under the influence of the Spring sun. A number of his hearers were quite ready to believe this tale, as it harmonized more nearly with what they had been told of the country than his first account.

So powerful were the influences opposed to Lord Selkirk's scheme that even parliamentary privileges were invoked in efforts to bring its influence to bear to deter him from his purpose.

We can sense something of the determined character of the noble Earl, when in the face of ridicule and misrepresentation, he proceeded to gather together a small flotilla of three vessels, the largest of which was only four hundred tons burden—the Prince of Wales, the Mary and Ann, and the Eddystone. These he assembled at the port of Stornaway, where he embarked seventy settlers on July 26, 1811. Most of these were from the north of Scotland, with a few from the north of Ireland.

Thus began a voyage that was to rank in historical importance with that of the famed argosies of ancient Greece and the celebrated Puritan Fathers of Mayflower fame.

The voyage was unusually stormy, occupying the record time of sixty-one days. The settlers suffered severely from the cold and the cramped quarters and still more from the ravages of the then common sea disease of scurvy, brought on by the too liberal use of salted meats, and which naturally attacked the landsmen with unusual virulence.

It was the intention that the settlers should go right through to the Red River, but owing to the delay in pas-

sage, this was found to be impossible, and they were landed at York Factory, on the south-western shore of Hudson's Bay, between the mouths of the Hay and Nelson rivers. Here the Hudson's Bay factor, Auld, refused them accommodation in any of the factory buildings, with the result that they were obliged to subsist for a time in tents in the bleak semi-Arctic Winter. They proceeded to a wooded section some distance up the Nelson River, where they built for themselves log huts, which they thatched over with moss and plastered with the white clay found in the vicinity. Each contingent of settlers had been provided with letters authorizing the purchase of certain supplies against the account of Lord Selkirk, but Auld refused to accept the authority, with the result that strife broke out, and one rash party of the settlers planned to attack the food warehouse. The settlers had been advised not to bring out cash, as there was no medium for circulating same. Auld finally agreed to allow them a certain amount of food, and with this and what fish they could catch, they managed to subsist through the severe Winter, although it was well on into the season before they finally obtained an antidote for the scurvy by boiling the bark of the pine trees.

Boats had been provided and sent out for their use in navigating the lakes and rivers, but through a stupid dispute between the ship's officer in charge and an official of the Company, who refused to accept instructions for their unloading, they were actually carried back to the Old Land. The settlers constructed a very crude form of flat-boat, but it was not until June 22, 1812, that the ice had broken up sufficiently to enable them to set out on their long voyage of over seven hundred miles to their destination. Following the course of the Hays River until they had gotten above the falls and rapids of the mighty Nelson, they passed over to that stream and so on over the reaches of Lake Winnipeg and the course of the Red to the Forks, as the junction of the latter with the Assiniboine River was known, and where was situated Fort Garry of the Hudson's Bay Company, arriving there on August 30, 1812, exactly four hundred days from the date of their embarkation at Stornaway. Contrast this in

your mind with the passage of a modern company of emigrants brought out in a few days on palatial liners and luxurious trains, and their oft repeated wails at their being distant twenty or thirty miles from a railway station, and with only a weekly or semi-weekly mail service. It was six months after the battle of Waterloo when these settlers learned of that titanic struggle and the fate of their kinsmen engaged therein.

Now began a terrific struggle for existence. The first contingent had been chosen for their ability to construct buildings for contingents to follow. They did manage to erect a few huts and to break up small parcels of ground, but their leader, Miles McDonald, saw that it would be impossible for them to subsist over the Winter months at this point, until they had more land under cultivation, so he led them to a point some seventy miles further south, where they would be in touch with a supply of buffalo meat. Here they erected a small post, which they dignified by the name of Fort Daer, Daer being the family name of the house of Douglas, and here a few of them remained, cultivating the soil. It was owing to this fortuitous circumstance that the northern boundary of the United States was limited to the forty-ninth parallel of latitude, which runs through the site of Fort Daer. How timely was the action of Lord Selkirk is seen by the fact that the treaty of Ashburton was signed in 1820, and the annual treks of the settlers ceased in 1819.

For seven years then, the settlers went south each Autumn, returning north each following Spring to cultivate their little plots of ground.

In 1812 another small contingent came direct through by the same route, but the contingent of 1813, ninety three in number, had a much more difficult time. Among these were the great grandparents of the writer with their little flock of children, and I dare say little else. Typhoid fever broke out on board ship and some half-dozen were buried at sea. Several more died at Churchill, among whom were the great-grandfather of the writer.

It had been the intention to land them at York Factory, but the captain, whether from dread of the fever

or of being icebound over the Winter owing to an unusually slow passage, refused to carry out his contract, and sailed direct to Churchill. Here the unfortunate settlers were left to shift for themselves over the desolate Arctic Winter, during which the temperature never once rose above 32 and frequently went as low as 60 below zero. Auld, who had supervision over both York and Churchill Factories, refused them housing accommodation, and as their presence made an unexpected drain on supplies, he restricted them to the barest necessities, claiming that he had scarcely sufficient for the trading purposes of the district. The settlers went up the Churchill river some twenty-three miles to a wooded district, where they built for themselves log shanties. During the Winter, a large flight of ptarmigan came into the woods for shelter, supplying them with much-needed relief. Auld, however, made this an excuse for demanding surrender of the locks of their guns, claiming that they were trespassing on Hudson's Bay Company grounds, and threatened to discontinue supplies entirely if his order was not obeyed. The settlers were obliged to fore-go the much-required food, but managed to hide from him one gun, with which they got a small supply of game. By fishing through the ice Esquimo fashion, and by trapping the scarce game in the neighborhood, they managed to eke out a precarious existence. It was not until July 6 that they were able to commence their long trek of nearly nine hundred miles by way of the western shore of Hudson's Bay via York Factory to the Red River. Hauling their effects on improvised hand sleds, with a Highland piper in this midst cheering them on by the inspiring strains of the pibroch, they set out on their route. Their course is a veritable maze of sloughs, rocks and streams, in which even experienced trappers have lost their lives. It is the home of the mosquito, the sand-fly and the voracious bulldog fly, all of which are deadly poisonous to newcomers from Britain. How hardy they were is evidenced by the fact that the wife of one of their number, McKay by name, gave birth to a child on the second day out from Churchill. The settlers dare not delay, but made a rude shelter of poles and willows for their protection and left what food they could spare. McKay, by

forced marches, hauling his wife and new-found heir, was actually able to catch up with his comrades at York Factory.

The settlers, located on one of the richest alluvial soils on the face of the earth, would no-doubt have quickly established themselves, had it not been for the interference of the Northwest Company, who looked on them as wards of the Hudson's Bay Company, and as a nucleus around which the latter company could conduct operations against themselves.

The Northwest Company first attempted bribery, promising free transportation to Ontario and free lands in the older settled district there. By threats and bribery they did induce a hundred and forty settlers to accept their offers, who on arrival in the East, they promptly left to their own resources. At one stage of the struggle, the total Irish contingent, on completion of their contract with Lord Selkirk, deserted to the service of the Northwesters. The old Covenanting Highlands however, having put their names to an agreement, could not be moved by force or bribery, so the Northwesters commenced to practice on them a reign of terror. Shots would be fired in the thickets by night, haystacks would mysteriously be set on fire, their houses would be entered and ransacked, fences would be broken down at night and the horses of the buffalo hunters driven in to destroy their meagre crops, boats and fishing nets would disappear and every form of persecution imaginable was practiced against them. Finding all forms of terrorism unavailing, their enemies, during the Winter of 1814-15, made elaborate preparations to oust them by force. A force of eighty heavily-armed French half-breeds was assembled and converged on the settlement on June 25, 1815. The settlers took refuge in a blacksmith shop, and with a few flintlock guns in their possession, made what resistance possible. They were however, heavily over-matched. One of them was killed, and some reports state that every other man but one was wounded. There is no doubt but that they would have been put to complete slaughter had it not been for the timely intervention of Chief Peguis of the Bungy tribe of Indians.

Peguis had been converted to Christianity, and learning of the plight of his white friends, drew his force to the scene of the struggle, notifying the Northwesters that he would take part against them if they would not at least permit the settlers to depart peacefully. As the friendship of the fur-trading Indians was of great value to the Company, consent was finally extracted. The settlers were driven into their frail dugouts and canoes and were sent down the river, witnessing the destruction of their hard-won homes. Houses, fences and crops were ruthlessly destroyed and every trace of their industry obliterated. Proceeding to Norway House at the northerly extremity of Lake Winnipeg, they were met by the fourth incoming contingent of settlers, numbering about one hundred, and bravely resolved to return with them to the scene of their disaster. This they did, recommencing the erection of homes and the cultivation of the soil.

This so infuriated the directors of the North-West Company, that they sent out to their factors the most imperative instructions that at any cost of bloodshed the settlers must be driven from the district without further delay. Strongly-armed forces were assembled at Port Arthur to the East and Fort Qu'Appelle to the West, who were to converge on the settlement for the final act in the drama.

It might be stated that at each of these attacks on the settlement, every possible attempt was made to induce the Indians to join, but they were uniformly friendly to the settlers and resolutely refused. In each instance, the half-breeds employed were dressed in Indian war-garb and made use of the war-cry. They were decked out in paint and feathers, so that, should the matter come to the attention of the Canadian or Imperial authorities, the blame could be placed on the Redmen. In the present instance, only some five renegade Indians, who had deserted their tribes, could be induced by the liberal use of bribery and fire-water to join up with the Qu'Appelle force. The Eastern force, held up by the rocky nature of the country, were three days late in arriving at the appointed rendezvous, but the Qu'Appelle force, some eighty five in num-



her, heavily-armed and buoyed up by the sacking of the Hudson's Bay post at Brandon House and of their store at The Crossing, as Portage La Prairie was then named, appeared on the scene on the afternoon of June 19, 1816. The alarm was quickly spread and the settlers, fleeing wherever possible to the eastern bank of the Red river, made their way to the protection of Fort Douglas. Fort Douglas had been formerly erected by the North-Westerns near the junction of the Red and Assiniboine under the name of Fort Gibraltar. They still regarded it as theirs by right, although it had been captured by the Hudson's Bay forces, dismantled and the logs floated down the Red to be re-erected on Point Douglas, in the north-easterly section of the present city of Winnipeg. From this point, Governor Semple of the Hudson's Bay Company set out with a total of twenty-seven settlers and Hudson's Bay men in an effort to hold up the advance of the attackers until the women and children could be brought to safety. The two forces met at a farm named Seven Oaks just north of the present boundary of the city. Here the settlers attempted to deploy in open formation to stay the advance, but their enemy, outnumbering them three to one, advancing in the form of a crescent, speedily hemmed them into a compact body, with the exception of six men, who later escaped the fate of their fellows by fleeing to the shelter of the wooded river banks. One of the French half-breeds, Boucher by name, advanced to Governor Semple, demanding the surrender of the fort. As he was using his rifle in a threatening manner, the Governor seized the barrel and turned it upward. In the struggle the weapon was discharged. Boucher slid from his horse on the far side, and his companions, thinking that he had been shot, executed a similar manoeuvre and immediately poured a devastating volley into the ranks of the closely massed settlers, who went down almost to a man. One North-Wester was killed and one wounded, but in a few moments they had thrown themselves on the remaining settlers, dispatching them with their hunting knives. The bodies were horribly mutilated by the drunken half-breeds and Indians and were left for two weeks on the prairie to be devoured by wolves and the ravenous dogs of the

settlement. The clothing was torn off and carried away as trophies, after the dancers had danced in and out between the bodies of their unfortunate victims, chanting the war-cry and singing songs in celebration of their triumph. The following night, after the fort had been surrendered to them, they celebrated there by dancing naked, Indian fashion, in joy of their achievement. Only one of the settlers who had met them was spared, a man by the name of Pritchard. He, seeing a half-breed whom he knew, appealed to him for protection. This man took his place in front of him and warded off the attempts of his comrades to knife him. Pritchard, after being vilified with every curse imaginable, was sent as an emissary to the fort with a demand that, if it were not unconditionally surrendered, that every man, woman and child would be put to the same horrible death that had been meted out to their fellows. The settlers, deprived of their main fighting force could not offer effective resistance. They, however, refused to surrender until they were promised that their effects would be left to them. An elaborate show of invoicing was made, but needless to say, that was the last that they saw of their holdings. The hapless settlers were again driven into their boats and for a third time witnessed the destruction of their homes by flames. They proceeded to Jack Fish Point on the eastern shore of Lake Winnipeg, where they remained awaiting further developments.

I remember, as a lad of some twelve or fourteen years of age, in my father's home, hearing a nephew of Pritchard recount as nearly as possible in the exact words of his uncle, the tale of this gruesome massacre, and the reader may imagine how intensely interesting was the description to a boy of that age, especially as it concerned his own relatives.

At the time of the massacre, Lord Selkirk was in Eastern Canada in an effort to induce the Government to extend some measure of protection to his harassed colonists. Here his efforts were fruitless; as almost every man of prominence was a shareholder in the North-West Company.

He then proceeded to gather together a force recruited from two Swiss regiments disbanded at the close of the Napoleonic War, and who had come to Canada in search of farm lands. By offer of liberal pay while in his service and free lands in the Red River district, he induced some two hundred of them to enlist under him. He was proceeding west on Lake Superior, when he was met by a Hudson's Bay factor in a canoe, bearing the melancholy tale of the Seven Oaks massacre. Words can scarcely describe the anguish and anger of the noble-hearted Earl on learning of the fate that had befallen his innocent wards.

On arriving at Port Arthur at the westerly extremity of the lake, where was situated the chief distributing post of the North-Westers, he decided on attacking same, as he had learned that several of the Seven Oaks assailants were quartered there. The post was surrendered without resistance, but a large number of small arms was secreted in an outbuilding with the intention of recapture. This was discovered and suppressed. Lord Selkirk here found a great number of bales of furs looted from Hudson's Bay stores. Under his authority as magistrate he gave preliminary trial to those men who had taken part in the massacre, and sent them to Eastern Canada for trial in the courts there. Here, although a number were convicted, they were under the protection of powerful friends, and none of them were ever actually made to suffer for the crime. It is a fact, and one regarded by the intensely religious Highlanders as an act of providence, that almost every one of these subsequently met death by violent means. This, in the unsettled state of a new country, would not be as strange as it might now appear. Lord Selkirk has been severely criticized by even friendly historians for his action in this respect, chiefly because it practically broke the fortunes of the rival company. The writer fears however, that had he been in a similar position, had owned a personal estate and had arrived to find his tenants brutally slaughtered, that that beautiful white grove of birch trees on the hillside out of Port Arthur would have carried some gruesome decorations on his finding the criminals in his possession.

Lord Selkirk's force continued on to the Red River, where they took possession without resistance. He himself followed shortly after, when his legal duties were ended. He recalled his settlers, and by placing among them his soldier followers, made the community safe from further attack. The rival companies, realizing the futility of their warfare, shortly afterwards formed an amalgamation. He then completed treaties with the Indian tribes, by which they recognized his rights to the lands occupied by his settlers. It was here, by the lavish distribution of the white metal, that he became ever afterwards known to the Indians as the Silver Chief. One term of this treaty deserves mention, as it was so characteristic of the Red-man. It was that the settlers were to be entitled to land as far distant from the banks of the river as a white horse could be seen on a clear day. This worked out at two miles, and as the farms were ten chains or 220 yards wide, they formed long lanes. At a later date the Dominion Government augmented each settler's holdings by a further grant of a quarter-section, which extended the farms to four miles in length. As these were subsequently divided amongst the descendants, instances were known where one person owned a farm of one chain, or twenty-two yards in width and four miles in length. The arrangement worked out to advantage, as the homes formed a long village line adjacent to the river, and was most convenient for protection and social purposes.

Lord Selkirk then returned to Eastern Canada to carry on the prosecution against the attackers of his colony. Two years of most tiresome litigation followed, during which he himself was actually brought to trial for his action at Port Arthur. The total cost of the settlement, £114,000, had wrecked his fortune, and, a rather delicate constitution broke under the strain. He retired to the village of Pau in France in an effort to recuperate, but sank steadily and passed away at the early age of forty-nine years, as truly a martyr to patriotic fervor as ever was soldier on the field of battle. His name will go down in history as one of the greatest, if not the greatest colonizer in the greatest colonizing nation the world has known, and it is held in reverence by the descendants of his set-

tlers to this day. The Lord Selkirk Association of Ruperts Land, has already erected a handsome monument in beautiful Kildonan park to the memory of the Indian chief Peguis, and hold considerable funds for a similar purpose regarding Lord Selkirk when times become more propitious.

The writer here takes the liberty of imposing on the reader a poem from one of his works, descriptive of the massacre at Seven Oaks.

The prairie shone as one vast burnished shield
Beneath a brazen and unyielding sun.
The little band that rashly took the field
Stood hesitant, outnumbered four to one,
The while the crafty foe, in cruel pride,
Advanced his savage ranks on either side.

What bloodless demon from the nether hell
Gloated amid that hideous painted throng?
The sudden slaughter, the faked Indian yell,
The reeking tomahawk and vaunting song,
The quivering scalp, torn from the sinking head,
And that weird dance amidst the ghastly dead.

God's mercy on the hapless settler now,
Shrinking behind the slender palisade,
Before a ruthless foe compelled to bow,
His steadfast heart alone still unafraid;
His home thrice burned, again in bitter stress
He braves the terrors of the wilderness.

Ah! little stone, to future ages tell
What dire distress our fathers suffered here—
The unremitting scourges that befell
Their unbowed wills, scornful of death or fear.
Shall sons of dauntless sires such as these
Dread the worst pangs of future destinies?

Theirs were the nobler virtues, sweet and pure,
Of souls who felt the sacrificial flame;
Ours the inspiration to endure,
That springs anew at mention of their name.
This little shrine, where they poured out their blood,
Shall be the symbol of our nationhood.

From this time onward the settlement gradually prospered, although in 1826 and again in 1852 the farmers were driven from their holdings by floods, which overflowed the river banks for some ten miles. The houses were not carried away, but all sign of cultivation was destroyed and the land could not be sown either year. More serious was the destruction wrought by grasshopper plagues that attacked the district over many years. Attracted by the green fields of grain in the midst of the vast prairie stretches, these parasites descended by the millions on their errands of destruction, and not only wiped out every trace of grain, but devoured the grasses of the plains, to the great distress of man and beast. Another great plague was that of infectious diseases—scarlet and typhoid fevers, tuberculosis, diphtheria, etc. The homes were all log shanties, almost hermetically sealed during the cold Winter months, with the result that the women of the settlement, in their eagerness to render help, really acted as carriers and spread the diseases. Consumption, as we then named tuberculosis, was not so fatal to the pure white blood, but was deadly wherever a mixture of Indian blood appeared, and whole families were frequently wiped out by this dread disease.

As late as 1870 the settlement was not without danger of extinction. The Scotsmen resolutely refused to join with the Riel forces in their rebellion. Although only two men, Scott, who was shot by Riel after a farcical court-martial, and Hugh Sutherland, shot by an escaping rebel were actually killed, the houses were raided and arms seized wherever located. Rather strangely, the danger came not so much from the French half-breed rebels, who through long association with the Scottish buffalo-hunters, had become friendly, as from their women folks, who, on the refusal of the men to wipe out the loyalists, organized for the definite purpose of putting the settlement to massacre, an act that they were quite capable of accomplishing, owing to their greatly superior numbers and the unarmed state of the Scottish element. So great was the danger that, as related to the narrator by his own brother-in-law, he and many others brought their families from outlying districts to the old homes, so that, in the last extremity,

they might at least all perish together. The danger vanished with the arrival from Eastern Canada of the expeditionary force led by Colonel Wolseley, but in the interval a new danger threatened.

Riel had seized the only newspaper in the colony and had placed it in charge of a Fenian, one Robinson, who devoted all his resources towards inducing the rebels to throw in their lot with the neighboring republic. As a consequence of the encouragement thus given, several Fenian raiding parties were organized at points south of the line, one of which advanced as far as the border. Here the American authorities fortunately took action and forced abandonment of the enterprise.

The final danger to threaten the settlement came when the powerful Sioux tribe, in the late seventies, getting the worst of it in their struggles against the American authorities, crossed the adjacent border to join their fellow tribesmen, the Assiniboines. These latter had been driven out of the district by the Bungy tribe just prior to the coming of the settlers, and there was every danger that the joint Sioux and Assiniboines would attempt to recapture their original holdings. The writer can faintly recall the strict warnings not to get out of sight of home and mother, lest some of the marauding parties might carry him away. The authorities in both countries took joint action, resulting in the Sioux being induced to return to the States, thus averting the last threat to the colonists.

A short sketch might be made before closing as to the daily life of the colonists. For some sixty years they depended almost entirely for food on the supply of fish and buffalo meat. They had brought with them hand-loom, with which they wove a blanket cloth called thread-about, made from alternate strands from the fleeces of black and white sheep. It was practically indestructible, but much too warm for comfort in the hot Manitoba Summers. From a small supply of metal available they hammered out shares for their hand-ploughs and blades for the sickle and scythe. Their forks, harrows, hoes, etc., were all made of wood. Their small plots of ground were hand-sown,

were reaped with the sickle, threshed with the flail and ground into a coarse meal by the use of the nether-stones, exactly as used by the ancient Egyptians. These latter were most interesting. Two circular stones were fashioned about two feet in width and six inches in depth. Through the center of the upper stone a hole was bored, through which was inserted a stout wooden peg, which rested in a hollow in the under stone. The grain was filtered by hand into the center of the upper stone, which was laboriously turned around by hand by means of a wooden peg fastened near the rim, and a coarse meal thus ground out. Caps, mitts, moccasins, canoes, dugouts, and many household utensils were fashioned Indian style. They made their own candles, harness, etc., while the Red River cart, famed for its noise and the fact that no metal was used in its manufacture, has come down in history as a unique contrivance.

How hardly they were put to it for subsistence is best illustrated by a fact related to the author by his mother. It was a common occurrence for her father to be compelled to forbid his children to rise from bed in the mornings, as he had found his net bare of fish, and they would not become ~~so~~ hungry by lying in bed as they would by moving about in play, he having no other means of supplying them with food.

Another sidelight is shewn in the experience of a grandfather who found it necessary to go to St. Paul—there was no Minneapolis in those days—for certain necessities not obtainable in the West. Leaving Prince Albert, where two of his sons lived, in the Spring, the long train of carts, following the ridges between the prairie swamps, required six weeks to reach Kildonan. Here they stayed with us a few days to rest their oxen. Six more weeks were needed to reach St. Paul. Another six weeks were required for the return trip, by which time it was too late in the season to attempt to return to Prince Albert, so they were obliged to remain with us over the Winter, the whole round trip of some 2,400 miles thus occupying around fourteen months.

The settlement has since expanded into the populous city of Winnipeg. Its historical importance and the remarkable foresight of its founder are now only beginning to be realized by its citizens.

The writer concludes with a poem written at a time when it was thought possible to proceed with the proposed monument to Lord Selkirk.

Grey stone who bearest on thy rising breast
Yon marble pillar, proudly reared on high,
When the fierce scourge of tyrants had oppressed,
How, like a beacon in the morning sky
Was he, whose name thy noble front reveres
In silent tribute through the passing years.

How that great heart in rising anger burned,
In scorn of danger and of gathering foes;
Swift in fierce wrath upon the tyrants turned,
Till freedom, neath his shield again uprose,
And the torn peasant, on the trackless moor,
Regained again a hospitable door.

His was the splendour of the patriot's dream.
Though open court to youth and fame allured,
One only purpose did he hold supreme;
To sterner virtues by his sins inured,
This was the inspiration of his song—
The ancient war of right on wrath and wrong.

Mourn not a Douglas, fallen in his prime,—
The heir of chivalry and high emprise,
A Celt inspired by an ideal sublime,
The light of other worlds within his eyes;
Grandeur and glory, misery and pain
Are not a measure in his immortal strain.

Ye fertile prairies, happy homes of peace,
Turn back the tablets of the circling years.
See o'er the waste of stormy northern seas
The tossing band of hardy pionéers.
Recall the toil, the trials and the slain
Ere fell the gates to your beloved domain.

And you, ye dusky tribes, whose fathers knew
And held in reverence "The Silver Chief",
Ye mourn the passing order, while you view,
From your lone isolation, filled with grief,
A changing world, devoid of those kind deeds
Wherein he met your ever varying needs.

Britain, where'er thy banners are unfurled
O'er younger Britons, born beyond the seas, *Britains*
Fear not the challenge of the foeman hurled
In loud defiance. While heroic names like these
Inspire thy sons, thy fame shall stand secure
As long as Selkirk's memory shall endure.

*The Earl of Douglas meets death
in battle against the Moors while
attempting to carry the embalmed
heart of King Robert Bruce to
Jerusalem for interment.*

SELKIRK

I sing Ulysses, the heart-stirring bold
Adventurous spirit of heroic days,
Of Jason and the shining fleece of gold,
Who brought to ancient Greece the enduring bays,
Of pale Columbus on the western main
Faring in peril for glory and for Spain.

These followed o'er far seas one starry gleam,
Faith shining like a beacon in the soul;
Some fabled land of hope their port o'dream,
Some isle Elysian their beckoning goal.
The free winds fanned them, and the ocean foam
Bore them in joy where'er they chanced to roam.

And their heroic names are never dead,
Nor shall they die while valour still remains
Within the human breast, to freedom wed.
Where they expired the sentient earth retains
The flavour of their deeds, and buds anew
In amaranthine flowers and honeyed dew.

That self-same spirit shone on Britain's shore
When, fired with burning faith and holy zeal,
His solemn vow the bold crusader swore,
To guard the cross with consecrated steel,
Striving to death against the paynim host
And the puissant Moor's insentient boast.

And in their midst was one of knightly fame,
The perfect flower of Scotland's gallant sons.
His king was dead in tragic grief and shame
For that his heart with great desire had once
Been set to free from pagan rites abhorred
The sepulchre exalted of the Lord.

This he had failed. Ah how we all do fail
To win the goal of our supreme desire.
Our finest resolutions faint and quail
Before the heights to which we would aspire.
Some hope enshrined is all we garner here—
Sad wisdom, wed to poignant doubt and fear.

"Ah that this heart of mine were buried there
To rest in peace by my dear Saviour's side
Within that tranquil vault, so might I share
That peace that with the absolved doth abide;
There where his grace and glory do illumine
With light empyreal the shrouded tomb.

Thomas Douglas, the Fifth Earl of Selkirk, was the head of the powerful and wealthy house of Douglas, noted throughout the whole length of Scottish history. Statesman, philanthropist and author, whose works are still extant as text books, he was probably the greatest colonizer in the greatest colonizing nation the world has known. He spent his great fortune and that of his wealthy wife, Jean Weidderburn-Colville, in transferring evicted tenantry from the north of Scotland to Prince Edward Island, Ontario and Manitoba. His settlement on the banks of the Red River saved western Canada from encroachment and possible absorption by American migration. His death at the early age of forty nine was principally due to worry caused by legal persecution by powerful interests opposed to his emigration schemes.

Douglas to thee, my tried*and noble friend,
Whose heart hath never from the battle turned,
But glories in the strife unto the end;

Thou above all my constant faith hath earned.
When I am fled, take thou this heart of mine
In sacred trust to bear it to His shrine."

The way was long o'er distant sea and land,
And changeful perils shocked them as they went.
Fierce paynim hosts were fought on every hand
Until the faithful few were waste and spent.
The holy warfare seemed a foolish thing,
And Christ himself appeared a phantom king.

Then came a day of fearful heat and storm.
Men fought as phantoms in a phantom dream.
Where'er they slew a single foeman's form
An hundred spears across their path did stream.
So fighting drooped they slowly one by one
Until the noble Douglas stood alone.

Then took he from his breast the silver case
Bearing the heart, and crying with loud voice
"Lead and I follow" flung it far apace.
His claymore sang as though it would rejoice
In one last Highland fray. With stroke on stroke
Straight through their serried ranks he sternly broke.

They found him where the dead were thickest strewn
Slain by his hand, and clasping to his breast
The precious casket. Not a sigh or moan
Disturbed those lips, that spake at last of rest.
They say the paynim took the heart in fear
And placed in reverence by the Saviour's bier.

Ah, who would mock, as scoffers do in scorn,
Who see alone the things that meet the eye.
Each morn new wonders to the world are born.
Each eve new beauties deck the starry sky.
What boots it then though carpers rail or cease,
So at the last the kingly heart hath peace.

* * * * *

Two thousand years the Douglas reigned supreme;
Their fortress crowning sweet St. Mary's Isle,—
A silver castle by a silver stream
Near the meandering Dee, that doth beguile
The wayward traveller with its joyous song,
Rippling in merry glee its shoals along.

Their heroes died with Wallace when he bled
For Scotland's freedom. Glorious Bannockburn
Beheld their standard, torn and dripping red.
Flame o'er the shattered foe, nor did return
That valiant boast, that they alone didst yield
To sovran death upon the battle field.

The music of the stirring trumpet hail,
The squadron's thundering charge, the shivering lance,
Bright sunlight glancing on a gleaming mail
Filled all their days with glamour and romance.
Great deeds of prowess throbbed in every vein,
And never craven fear their vows did stain.

They sought their end on some hard-stricken field,
With sword in hand, facing a furious foe.
With thrust of spear-point and with clashing shield,
Shouting their warrior songs they forth did go
Joyful to death, that so their fame might bear
Proud trophies to Elysian temples fair.

'Twas on that hard-fought field of Otterburn
That Archibald of Douglas hero was;
Whose valiance and skill the fight did turn:
The foe was breaking and the noble cause
Of freedom gained; his squires did kneel and pray
That he his aged arm from strife might stay.

"Spare to thy sons some share in this renown.
Your arms are stained with gore; the stricken foe
In fear is stayed, and you, o'er-wearied grown,
May rest in honour, lest some chanced blow
Should harm you. Quit you now the field.
We in your stead will force the foe to yield."

"Valhalla welcomes not from feathery bed
The valiant brave. Stay me no more, no more.
To-night I sleep with the heroic dead;
The morn shall greet me on that warrior shore.
Joyful I go to meet that mighty throng
And join their feast of wine and battle song."

Freedom to them was an impassioned thing;
Justice the sword to guard it by their side;
Their valour was the bulwark of their king;
All these came down the centuries to abide
Within the heart of one, who gave to fame
The final glory of his deathless name.

Selkirk: How swells in proud remembrance
The homage to thy worth. A seventh son:
Was that some mystic radiant second-sense
To shape thee when thy life had just begun
To noble deeds? War may its fame afford,
But peace hath victories to outmatch the sword.

And cruelty and greed do not belong
To one world cycle. His it was to war
Even to death against a vulpine throng
Entrenched in power and sedulous to mar
His kindly aims; who saw his ancient race
Driven from their homes to give the beast a place.

A legend says that round his cradled head
A mystic light did circle halo-wise;
As though the Christ his radiance had shed
To steel that soul for some great sacrifice.
And from that light throughout his life there came
A dream that was a vision and a flame.

Selkirk's personal friends included such notables as Sir Walter Scott, Robert Burns, Sir William Hamilton, Jeffrey, Clark, Ferguson and Duquald Stewart, who regarded him as fully a hundred years in advance of his contemporaries in vision. His character was exemplary in kindness and personal disinterestedness.

Great friendships make great men, and he was blest
In fellowship of that immortal bard
Who sang the Minstrel Lays—the eager quest
Of errant knight, who to the death had warred
In thrall of beauty, and his life did stake
For lovely Ellen Douglas of the Lake.

And by him stood the gifted Ferguson,
Jeffrey and Burns—names to conjure with now.
He held their faith and love when all was gone.
To sell adversity they could not bow,
And held him in advance an hundred years
Beyond the vision of his best compeers.

Ah! but his conscience was a subtle thing.
Though prescience warned him of the powers of greed,
Himself to peace or rest he could not bring
While wives and children moaned in dolorous need,
His high estate, his wealth, his fame and power
Were gifts to measure in that tragic hour.

*O what a thing is conscience to disturb
The unstable mind. It teases in the night
With thinking on the wailings of the poor.
It feels the anguish of the mother's breast
When little children cry in vain for food.
It looks with anger and with fierce disdain
On those who would an honest man dispoil.
It pricks the spirit with relentless spur
When weakness leads to folly and to sin.
It is the spirit's most unerring guide;
The mandate of the will intuitive.
It is the light of God within the soul;
His presence stirring in the human heart.
Justice and mercy mingle 'neath its sway.
And maketh them who honour it discern
'Twixt good and evil and become as Gods.*

The inspiration and the vision fled.
Or came and went intangible as flame.
His heart was torn 'twixt anger and 'twixt dread.
He saw against the grandeur of his name
The subtle sneer, where in that testing hour
False lives were given to pleasure and to power.

Lady Jean Wedderburn-Colville, who became Lady Selkirk, was an invaluable inspiration in his life, as she was in closest sympathy and accord with his philanthropic efforts. She used her wealth and influential social connections to the utmost in warding off the attacks of his enemies.

Then came he to a hall with gardens fair,
And in them found the loveliest of all flowers.
His heart gave pause a-while to rapture there,
As the warm earth responds to sunny showers.
Lifting his eyes, he saw her face to face,
And all the world illumined with her grace.

Somewhere within his heart a dream awoke
As beauty came on iridescent wings.
Music was in the lyric that she spoke.
As some sweet mavis soars and soaring sings
Of lucent dawns and lustrous evening skies,
New-mellowed in the light of mutual eyes.

How throbs the heart when first the burning cheek
Proclaims the glowing spark of flaming love,
Invokes in sighs the vows it dare not speak.
And treasures in its breast the new-fledged dove.
Swoons in the sight of some soul-breathing glance,
And bathes itself in passionate romance.

And Lady Jean was fair and wondrous wise
In Cupid's arts, as ever maidens were.
She knew the potent charm of lustrous eyes,
The silken meshes of her vagrant hair,
Her simple virgin beauty, void of guile,
That matched the enamouring sweetness of her smile.

And Douglas did, as ever lovers do,
Sang in his heart a sonnet of sweet sighs,
Wove passioned idyls,—votive gifts to woo
The enchanting Syrinx maid, whose luring eyes
Renewed the challenge of her twinkling feet,
And smiled in scorn at who would dare compete.

*My Lady Jean is blythe and gay,
Her presence is a sunny ray,
Cheering with joy the gladsome day.*

*The thrall of beauty in her face,
She moves with such alluring grace,
That lissom form I would embrace.*

*Her eyes are pools of dewy mist,
Blue-violet of the amethyst;
Her lips red rose-buds all unkissed.*

*The silken meshes of her hair
Set snares upon the ambient air
To catch my heart all unaware.*

*Her voice is as the brooklet's fall,
Sweet silvery sounds at interval,
Answering the muting robin's call.*

*And O, the rapture of her smile;
How beats my anxious heart the while
Its tranced spell doth me beguile.*

*But should she frown on me, alas!
How wearily the wan hours pass,
As slow sands sifting through the glass.*

*Yet when her slightest favours arm,
I hold within my heart a charm,
Not all the world can do me harm.*

*And thus in dear delight I dwell,
Bound by the magic of her spell
Her rarest loveliness to tell.*

*At last, at last the first fond kiss of love
Has sealed surrender of her fluttering heart.
Twin lips in mutual messages approve,
And fling the gates of Paradise apart.
Now is his strength redoubled in her life,
And seeks with joy to renew the arduous strife.*



The "Highland Clearance" as the eviction of crofters from their holdings in order to make room for more lucrative sheep farming and for deer parks, was named, was one of the most cruel and shameful episodes in Scottish history.

Shielings in flames, the crofter driven forth
To perish on the bitter Scottish moor:—
Such was the Highland Clearance of the north,
A bye-word long accursed among the poor
Of that brave land, whose sires had died in vain
The sacred rights of freedom to maintain.

From ancient lands where their forefathers toiled,
Ten thousand on the barren hillside roamed
Or died of want, their heritage despoiled:—
To blank despair and hopeless terror doomed.
Such was the sacrifice to Mammon made,
In tears and sighs upon his altar laid.

At that dread moment Scotland's gallant sons
For that same futile freedom fought abroad,
During the thunder of Napoleon's guns;
Not knowing of their dearest ones down-trod,
But yielding up their lives that God might bring
Peace to their homes and honour to their king.

And when at last the fearful strife was o'er,
And victory their valiant arms had crowned,
On the most southern port of England's shore
They were disarmed and straightway there disowned
By their own land, to fare as best they might
If e're they hoped to see old Scotland's sight.

Weary and wounded, in despondent mood
They trod the leaden footsteps league on league,
Aiding the sick and starving as they could,
Who drooped and died o'er-burdened with fatigue.
Wasted and haggard, over-spent and sore,
At length they sensed their native heath once more.

O what a joy it is to homeward turn,
Glimpsing in fancy all the answering smiles,
The old familiar scenes for which we yearn,
The very sod our quickening step beguiles.
The heart beats faster as we come more near
To where is harboured all we hold most dear.

What horrors then these heroes had to face.—
Their homes despoiled, their wives and children fled;
The deer and bleating sheep were in their place.
Death they had faced, in valour they had bled
For this, for this:—Ah you ye great and wise
How cometh glory in such hideous guise.

Failing to induce the British parliament to assist in his emigration schemes on account of their absorption in the struggle against the powerful Napoleon Bonaparte and their objection to losing men fitted for warfare, Selkirk turned for assistance to the Hudson's Bay Company, of which he was a director. Refusal was again met, due to the fear that agricultural settlements would mitigate against their lucrative fur trade. He then purchased a controlling interest in the Company and practically compelled them to sell him a tract of land suitable for his purpose in what is now parts of Manitoba, Minnesota and Dakota.

(This story's face carried
commencing on page 44)

The very air was laden with despair.

Broken and stunned they owned defeat at last.

This dreadful desolation everywhere

Tore at their hearts with anguish overcast.

No joy-bells rang, no welcoming voice replied

Save the dull echo of the mountainside.

O curse of war that slays the valiant brave.

What is this glamorous fame you over-rate.

This pomp and pride of which you boast and rave,

While fruitless slaughter is the hero's fate.

Whose parents sit with downcast eyes and brood,

Seeing alone the bodies bathed in blood.

The great lords of the realm in council meet;

The hour is fraught with action eloquent;

His gauntlet lies impatient at their feet;

Scathing his tongue with swift keen argument—

A realm to lose, a realm to be won

In one swift flight of yonder flying sun.

My Lords and Peers, great peers yet fellow-men,

I speak for justice, justice undefiled,

Which was the law of Britain and her pride.

There is a cancer burning in the state,

A leprous leach sucking the very blood

From-out the nation's heart,—a loathsome thing.

It is the wanton greed and lust for gain.

Gold is but gold; it cannot make you great.

Your fame and power, they cannot make you great.

Vast lands and fortresses around the world,

Your pomp and pride, these cannot make you great.

Greatness is in the heart and in the mind.

All things are great, however mean and small,

So they but tend to aid you fellow-men;

And ye are great whenever ye do serve.

Even as your Christ, the downcast and the poor.

I speak for justice, justice long delayed;

For there are men of Britain's loyal blood.

Whose wives and mothers lift despairing hands.

Their helpless children faint for lack of food.

God's hand shall rest upon the selfish horde

Whose filthy sheep-fed purse is gluttonous.

Gorged to the brim with price of human blood.

Men born to freedom cannot be enslaved.
There is no power on earth can make them slaves.
I cry your aid for these of Britain's name,
Who have been trodden down in lust of gold.
They are your own, so help them at their need.
They fight for you when Britain is at war.
They toil for you when Britain is at peace;
Aye, and in art and learning they have won
Great fame for Britain, fame that will endure.
Help me to aid them, so ~~shall~~ ye be great,
And Britain move toward a nobler end.

I speak for justice, justice long forsworn.
There is a land far-flung within the west,
Full half a continent it stretches free,
Where millions may abide in plenteous peace;
Loyal to Britain, but where alien eyes
Would wean it from allegiance to our king.
There on those grassy meads and fertile plains
Safe homes are theirs if ye do so accord;
And ye but do defeat your own wise ends,
When ye do thrust them forth to foreign shores.

True patriotism it is to exalt the state
And build it to new heights of eminence,
That it may be a leader in the world
In justice and in freedom down the years.
All that I have I dedicate to this,
My span of life, my substance and the force
Of what small talent I may here affect,
And at the end, with gladness, mine own life,
So Britain be absolved of her guilt.

If ye but give permission to this end,
That these your sons be saved from foreign lands
New Britains shall be born beyond the seas.
They shall be fortresses around the world.
And they shall stand beside her at her need,—
Bulwarks of Britain's greatness everywhere.

Then looked they each on each with furtive glance,
Dreading to read within each other's eyes
The scorn he had aroused; glimpsing askance
The subtle thoughts that in their minds did rise.
How they his lucid arguments might thwart.
Shame had no harbour in each callous heart.

And long they pondered on the weighty choice.

Evil was good, good evil to their mould,
And sympathy to suffering had no voice.

They gathered up the toga, fold on fold,
Of their high office, leaving him alone,
His lofty dreams and visions overthrown.

As went the pharisee along the way

With look averted, so they passed him by,
His creed, so far advanced beyond their day.

Scarcely evoked the tribute of a sigh.
The cold grey flag-stones of that haughty place
Were warmth and cheer beside their bloodless race.

Ever the high quest of the Holy Grail

Is strewn with crown of thorns and pierced side;
The flame of inspiration burneth pale;

The sanguine glow of sacrifice has died,
Or shrunken low before the world's chill breath
And the cold threatening wings of somber death.

Silence was on his lips, but in his heart

The bold crusader blood was stirred anew.
In cold disdain he drew himself apart:

The glory of the vision clearer grew.
Impetuous in the heat of his desires
Flamed the bold daring of his knightly sires.

Grief sat upon him heavy as a shroud:

But she, who blossomed in his heart and life
As doth a new-fledged rose of morn, aroused

His flagging spirit to renew the strife.
Together heart to heart divinely clear
They freed their souls from unavailing fear.

* * * * *

On to the heights, the night of dream is o'er.

The mists within the valley have been past.
One last appeal he makes, one last, no more;

The dial marks the hour, the die is cast.
Now fate and powers of greed be what ye may,
The sword is drawn, the scabbard thrown away.

With zeal renewed and ardour undismayed

The winged passion of his purpose grew.
He sought the Adventurous Company for aid.

Named o' the northern bay, and straight did sue
For lands where these sore buffeted and tried
In peaceful industry might safe abide.

One far-flung dream, steadfast and unafraid,
Can lift you high above the common mould
Of men whose souls are bound to sordid trade,
Whose hearts are lustered o'er with greed of gold;
Whose veins, congealed to sorrow or to pain,
List to the cries of misery in vain.

Give heed, give heed, here at the cross road stands
This glorious prairie-country's destiny.
Its fate is sealed forever in your hands.
God grant you strength and wisdom to decree
One high resolve, to guard it to the end,
That never foreign foot its soil offend.

Great is the God of Greed! he is the king
Whose temple riseth up into the skies.
With blood and tears of human suffering
His altar bears our daily sacrifice.
Within his crypt with reverent awe we kneel,
And pledge our vows in loyal love and zeal.

They were as one, who walking in a dream
Patterned alone of leisured pleasantries,
Moves in a maze wherein no strident theme
However lofty may disturb his ease
Fear that their fur-born wealth might be despoiled
Tore them with dread and his high purpose foiled

Fire must be fought with fire, so gold with gold;
He forced control of their great Company;
Compelled them to his will until they sold
His longed-for lands. Three little ships at sea
Were all he had his fateful hopes to bear,
Yet destined evermore to fame they were.

There is a fable old, who runs may read,—
"An Indian" ruled by drink's inhuman sway,
Beats his down-trodden wife,—a ghastly deed;
Yet he, who dares the wretch's hand to stay,
Finds himself pounced upon with tooth and claw
By both, a victim to their savage law."

So two great companies, who fiercely warred
To bitter death, fearing his aims might stay
Their fur-made gold, in furious anger barred
His path, using their utmost wealth and sway
To foul the new-found land with slanderous tongue,
And with despicable lies did do it wrong.

They spread abroad upon the listening air
Weird tales of snow-bound wastes and barren rocks,
Of howling wolf and fiercely savage bear;
Where thirst and famine the lone traveller mocks,
And brutal cannibals with stake and fire
Torture at some slow agonizing pyre.

They sought them out an edict, valid still,
Though born of the Dark Ages of despair—
The relic of some vicious tyrant's will,
Which penalized with death whoe'er might dare
To aid an emigrant from Britain's shore;
Treason 'twas called; a head the forfeiture.

The poem does not pretend to follow accurately the historic course of events. Only a few of the third contingent of settlers ^{went} came by way of Churchill, following the 900-mile route along the west coast of Hudson's Bay. The piper in their midst playing "The Road to the Isles" and other martial airs, and so on via Hays and Nelson rivers, Lake Winnipeg and the Red River to the present site of Winnipeg. Also Lord Selkirk, on learning of the first expulsion of his settlers, had already gathered a force of disbanded soldiers and was on his way westward, when he received the shocking news of the massacre at Seven Oaks. Further, on capturing the Nor-West fort near Fort William, he did not himself immediately proceed west, but sent forward a part of his force, who captured Fort Douglas without opposition. He remained for a time to hold preliminary trial of the agents of the Nor-West Company, who had taken part in the massacre, and whom he sent for trial to eastern Canada, where a number of them were found guilty, but through the influence of their friends escaped punishment. It is a fact that almost everyone of them met death eventually in one violent form or another.

As flint, the harder smitten, sendeth out
The brighter fire, so doth the valiant heart,
When fiercer foes encompass it about,
With greater courage their endeavours thwart;
Thus Selkirk, so contending, broke the chain
That strove to stay his winged course in vain.

* * * * *

There lies an island under western skies,
Green as a carpet in Ambrosia,
Where Eden did regain her Paradise—
A new-found innocent Acadia,
Where in some flowery fair acanthus dell
Sweet buds and fruits do cast their honeyed spell.

Here first he sought fulfillment of his dream,
Gathering him boats and those evicted men,
Who came with joy even at the faintest gleam
Of hope that they perchance might build again
Their broken homes. So did he sternly dare
His watchful foes, who filled with anger were.

From hill and moor, from heath and brackened glen
They heard his call and came in eager haste,
Widowed and orphaned, lads and stalwart men,
Until his ships were laden to the ~~waste~~ *waist*.
His sails unfurled, he gave them to the sea
In bold defiance of that harsh decree.

Happy their voyage was: a gentle gale
Bore them in joy upon a jade-green sea,
A smiling sun each morning gave them hail:
Each eve a silvery moon hung on their lea.
Safely they came to that fair isle of dream
With silvery birch and poplar grove a gleam.

It is a land of wondrous vales and hills,
Of gentle streams slow-moving to the sea
Through flowery meadows, where the sunlight spills
Its golden treasure over moor and lea.
Yet where the salty ocean tang gives speech
With memories of some far-off Highland beach.

Springtime and harvest, seed and ripened corn
Follow each other in unfailing round,
And learning like a shining cloak is worn
By all her sons, in wisdom far renowned:
Yet ever o'er the gifts bestowed by heaven
Shineth the bliss of peace and freedom given.

Here in this lovely land remote from fear
The first-fruit of his wondrous dream came true.
Month upon month and year on patient year
The wisdom of his vision clearer grew.
Now hosts in reverence his worth acclaim.
And centuries but add unto his fame.

Glad was his heart, his soul was greatly pleased
By virtue won in such sweet charity;
Yet still the wider vision never ceased
By day, by night that far fair world to see
In dreams, in dreams he saw his prairie lands
Peopled with happy homes and patriot bands

* * * * *

Once more the great adventure stirred his soul.
His ships and men have sped the western main.
And where Ontario's rugged frontiers roll
The Highland blood renews the ancient strain:
While in his soul a joy exultant sang,
As though some clarion trumpet victor rang.

* * * * *

Back to his native land and her he loved.
Their souls communion had in mutual joys:
Uplift in thoughts serene their spirits moved.
Yet ever through their bliss there came the voice.
The still small voice that would not let them wait
While hearts were torn and homes were desolate.

Then reverent before that sovran King,
Occult, ineffable, who is the Lord.
Their sacramental prayers and vows they bring.
And richly in their hearts his glory poured.
With souls that scarcely knew their bodies were
Lightly they trod the spiritual air.

So near His presence seemed, the cloistered air
Was stirred by an unbreathing roseate flame:
All muted harmonies of music rare
Wafted on subtly fragrant incense came.
A benedicite of peace and power
Was theirs to bless them in that radiant hour.

And as they knelt they saw a wondrous star,
Which seemed to them a symbol and a sign.
Low in the western sky it beamed a-far,
Glowing and beckoning with a light benign:
As though some nation's hope were cradled there.
Leading it out of bondage and despair.

All up and down the heath the message ran.
Each lonely shieling, every shepherd cot,
As though the Fiery Cross from clan to clan
A warning of some border warfare brought.
Did thrill to it, each hopeful heart did stir.
As men waked from ill dreams enchanted were.

An ancient bard of that prophetic strain
Of Highland seers, gifted with second sight,
Took up the harp that idle long had lain,
And smote the chords with fingers firm and light.
Sad was the theme yet cheerful was the lay
That sped the venturous pilgrims on their way.

Men of Pitlochrie and bonnie Kildonan
Far from the land of the heather ye ture,
Far from the land of your sign' and moanin', *sighin'?*
Rise up together and follow the star.

Men of the Highlands the grey dawn is breaking;
The morn of your happiness nearer doth seem;
March to the pibroch all sorrow forsaking;
Rise up together and follow the gleam.

Men of Kildonan the old ways are falling;
The new ways are beckoning us far from the sea;
The voice of the prairie is calling, is calling,
Men of Kildonan come down and be free.

Men of Kildonan the hard road 's before us
By sea and by forest a thousand leagues long,
But undaunted the purl of the pipes shall restore us,
And our way will be lightened, inspired by its song.

Men of Kildonan the new land is our land;
No lordling shall rule us, no hireling oppress;
The tyrants that broke us in dear bonnie Scotland
Shall never again our free spirits distress.

Men of Kildonan the pibroch shall cheer us,
Enumouring our hearts with "The Road to the Isles."
In our new-found Kildonan enchant and endear us
As our memory of Scotland its music beguiles.

Men of Kildonan we've signed a new covenant;
Though dangers may threaten, though perils appall,
Our hearts will be true and our faith will be constant
To guide and to guard us whatever befall.

Sadly they gazed their last upon the braes.
Their lovely golden braes of gorse and broom;
Through misty eyes they saw the hills ablaze
With purple heather. Moving in a gloom
Of bitter sorrow, came they to the shore,
Took ship and saw their native land no more.

How sad it is to bid a last farewell
To all the world has held of love and home;
Without a hope, without a friend to tell
How breaks the heart by foreign ways to roam—
An exile wandering o'er far fields forlorn,
By wistful pangs of memory overborne.

Day after day the three small vessels crept
Across the void and fought the stormy sea,
While in the fetid holds the fever swept
The wasted forms. Week after week the three,
Coated with ice, midst blinding sleet and snow,
Tossed on the heaving Arctic waves did go.

No boldest Viking of the daring north,
Praying to Odin for some worthy foe,
Within his wildest dreams had ventured forth
On such far-faring treacherous seas to go.
The old, old world forgot forever more,
On, on and ever on their vessels bore.

The swift battalions of Aurora lights
Swept round them with their brilliant silver spears,
Dancing in dazzling splendour through the nights,
Smiting their souls with awe-inspiring fears.
Eerie and beautiful their arrows came
In quivering sheets of violet-golden flame.

There on a battle-field of shimmering gold,
Spangled with silver stars, bright helmets gleamed,
And flashing squadrons forth in splendour rolled,
Circled and charged. Their purple banners streamed
Far down the throbbing night; their sabres glanced
In that weird strife as in a dream entranced.

The keen air and the crystal sparkling frost
Made strange mirages to their startled eyes.
Weird phantom worlds from-out the sea upstost
Amazed them in those clear fantastic skies.
In-awe they gazed on that enchanted scene;
Or good or ill its augury might mean.

Yet ever as they went there beamed the star;
Steadfast above the raging storm it shone.
Lo! in the western sky it gleamed a-far,

Guiding them on until its rays had grown
A wondrous light to cheer the fevered bed,
As promise of new hope its radiance shed.

Out of the west a whispering wind arose
Fragrant with perfume of the odorous pine.
Before their eager eyes at length unclosed
Three mighty streams, whose mossy banks entwined
Through low-lying marshlands to a misty shore.
Glad did they land, their treacherous voyage o'er.

Then first within that barren wilderness
They made them graves for their unburied dead.
Freed from the anguish of their last distress.

A wooden cross o'er each devoted head
Told simply how they came o'er stormy seas
Into this final haven of their peace.

Far from their patron's strong protecting hand,
Out-cast they were. Half-starved and thinly clad
They faced the Arctic frosts, that like a brand
Seared their lean frames, which the foul scurvy had
Embraced. The utmost hatred of their foes
Could not to greater grief or peril expose.

The bright translucent tang of Arctic airs,
The billowy snow in drifting waves uptost,
And all such beauty as the northland wears
In starry gems of crystal-jewelled frost
Did pall on them in that stern fight for life,
With shadowy fear and unknown terrors rife.

Slowly the long gray wintry weeks went by.
As though chill time unmoved had lost its will.
The icy barriers stood relentlessly
On lake and river, plain and rocky hill.
The tardy Spring and Summer went at last.
And Autumn days were near before they passed.

Hail! Highlanders Hail!
Arise for the day of your march is come.
Spring rides on the gale;
Birds are awake, and list to the hum
Of the wild bee winging across the glade.
Hearts never shall quail
Though the way be long and hard, be not dismayed.
Hail! Highlanders Hail!

Hail! Highlanders Hail!
Follow the cry o' the pipes 'til your goal be won.
March o'er hill and dale.
Weary the task of day 'out-running the sun ;
Yet never a day but is over at last.
March, march to the trail
That shall some glad morn be a thing of the past.
Hail! Highlanders Hail!

Week after week they trod the dreary trail
O'er dismal wastes, the pibroch leading on
With stirring battle-songs, that did avail
To cheer their drooping hearts, until they won
The margin of an inland sea, whose tide
Beyond all vision league on league did ride.

They left the trail, they grasped the gleaming oar;
And now by limpid lakes and islands green
Their frail craft bore them to that fertile shore.
Through misty eyes they viewed the verdant scene.
Four hundred days had passed in long array
Since last they gazed on distant Stornaway.

All in an Autumn hue of rose and gold.
With hearts uplift in silent thankful prayer
They trod the velvet plain and did behold
Bright jewelled flowers gleaming everywhere.
A very land of Paradise it seemed,
Fairer than aught in wildest fancy dreamed.

How hard they toiled it is not here to tell,
Nor of the humble homes so happily reared,
But of that brutal slaughter that befel
From enemies they all too lightly feared.
The tomhawk, the dart and fiery brand
Drove them in anguish from their cherished land.

Twice were they driven forth in blood and fire,
The ashes of their altars scattered wide
To the four winds of heaven in venegful ire.
Was it the vision and the dream that died,
And did the radiance of that guiding star
Vanish in gloom behind the western bar?

Within the stately halls of Mont Royal
Their loyal patron strove to bring them aid,
Where crafty foes midst cunning and cabal
Clasped with the hand while stabbed the secret blade,
Even as he toiled the ensanguined plain ran red
With gruesome horrors of the mangled dead.

The light-foot moccasin and slim canoe
Sped swiftly over prairie-land and lake;
Straight as an arrow to his presence flew
The dusky voyageur and panting spake
The fatal word, that with envenomed dart
Pierced to the death his over-anguished heart.

White-lipped the frail form bent beneath the blow,
But that great heart, too mighty for its frame,
Leaped in his breast at mention of the foe,
And burning at the insult to his name,
With fiery zeal beneath his standard drew
Brave volunteers sworn to his service true.

Along the margin of vast inland seas
He sped in eager haste; each morning mist
Hung opal pale, unmoved of any breeze;
High noontide glowed in gold and amethyst,
And ever on the stilly twilight fell
The spiced incense of the Autumn spell.

Against the sombre shadow of the pine
Stood out the startled maple's crimson fire;
The slim white poplars made a holy shrine
Where thrush and blackbird formed a tuneful choir
Beneath a heaven more tender and more blue
Than aught their fairest vision ever knew.

Within their fort, counting themselves secure,
The wanton murderers high revel held.
A sudden shadow swept across the door,
And panic fear their felon joy dispelled
At sight of him of all men they did fear
And that dread vengeance swiftly drawing near.

Yet never did he tarnish his great name
By petty vengeance, nor his power abuse
To private gain. Unto their lasting shame
He left them to their law, that did accuse;
But their high friends in scorn of trial fair
With power did free them from the hangman's snare.

Their bodies spared but yet their stained souls
Could not escape the fatal brand of Cain.
By violence did they win their vicious goals;
By violence overtaken were they slain.
'Tis not in mortal wisdom to forstall
God's mills that grind so silently and small.

Leaving them to their lesser Gods he went
Straight onward to his goal within the west.
His dreams still drove him forward, all intent
On one desire, that would not let him rest.
His followers on that eager face did gaze,
Whose power and ardent will did them amaze.

Oft did they marvel as the wilderness
Broke out in beauty on their startled sight;
Strange trees and blossoms woke to loveliness;
Vast lakes and rivers shone in primal might,
Clothed in that freedom unto all men dear,
Unknown to creeds' or custom's binding fear.

Up raging streams, through many a rocky gorge
They drove in toil their over-taxed ba-teaux;
Through tangled woods their hard-hewn way did forge,
Mid fens that never foot of man did know,
Until at last, O morn of their delight,
The long and level plain did greet their sight.

As flies the smoke from-out a smouldering fire
Before a driving wind, so fled the foe.
No longer did his vaunting rage aspire
To take the field, or chance one venturous blow;
Only stark ruin and the mounds of sod
Marked where his ravening footsteps once had trod.

So came he at the last unto the land
Of his fair dreams. He rallied to him there
The scattered remnants of his settler band,
These with his soldiers, so that none might dare
Recall again those cruel bitter years,
Filled with their agony of grief and fears.

A new Kildonan from her ashes rose
Vibrant with life, and quickly to her drew
Those who did tyranny and greed oppose;
Old Highland customs sprang to life anew,
And those who saw her in those olden days
Heard Selkirk's name upheld in reverent praise.

On one October morning cool and clear,
When every aspen leaf was turned to gold,
At the full mellow ripening of the year
He met that noble Indian, wise and bold,
Chief Pigwehais, whose valour stern and brave
Once saved the settlers from a bloody grave.

There on a sward beside the tranquil Red
They sat them down to smoke the pipe of peace,
Wise council there was held and treaty made
Whereby the land in a perpetual lease
From noble chieftain unto noble lord
Was given o'er in friendship and accord.

Within the hand of every Indian brave
A silver coin was set, a sign and seal.
No long-drawn documents did they engrave,
But simple clasp of hand confirmed the deal:
And from that day within their tribe, his name—
"The Silver Chief" they forthwith did acclaim.

Thus a great peace did come and joy did reign
In justice and in freedom down the years.
The cruelty of greed, the lust of gain
Lay vanquished by the valour of his spears;
And in his heart joy reigned again supreme,
Viewing the sweet fulfillment of his dream.

There rise a noble city's lofty fanes;
There march the myriad legions of the free
Across the vast illimitable plains;
There flies a British flag, that all may see
How Selkirk's dreams and visions did come true
Despite of all that grasping greed could do.

A thousand miles of fertile golden grain,
A thousand miles of forest and of mine,
Whose rising cities crowd the western main,
Sing of his glory and their powers combine
To form a jewel in an empire's crown
To blazon forth for aye his high renown.

But he, but he, by ruthless enemies
Hounded and harried through the law's delays,
Smitten by an inexorable disease,
Lay beating out the measure of his days
Upon a foreign shore: the spirit's glow
Still shining fearless on the last grim foe.

A sad-eyed shadow, robed in saintly grace,
Hovered around him with unfailing love,
Though faith unwavering did their souls embrace,
Scarcely for sorrow could her spirit move
When death did rend the mystic veil in twain,
And her dry lids sought healing tears in vain.

So did he pass, the hero of our lay,
Who died unhonoured of triumphal song;
Whose keen sword wore his sheath of life away;
Whose spears had stormed the gates of wrath and wrong.
Surely within some loftier realm of light
Do blossom forth again his visions bright.

Some hope we have that from our grateful praise
An influence may pass unto the dead
To comfort and approve. Haply the bays
Too late we do accord may somehow shed
A radiancy of glory in yon sphere
Around their names, too lightly honoured here.

And in that far fair world, whose golden-strand
Winds round the margin of the crystal sea,
Together as of old, close hand in hand
He walks with her he loved so tenderly,
There in those fragrant flower-encircled bowers
New dreams and visions bless their radiant hours.

There where their footsteps tread the vernal air,
Blossom sweet amaranth and asphodel;
fich ~~Sweet~~ honeyed fruits distill a fragrance rare
In rosy-scented bowers ambrosial.
There they serene forever blessed move
In Him Whose purest light and power is love.

* * * * *

ELEGY

Mourn not Britannia thy heroic dead,

Whose brows are crowned with laurel, but in pride
Accept their mead of glory, richly shed

On thy illustrious name, for which they died.

Rejoice for them, who through the somber door

Of that dark passage to the nether land

Rejoicing went, that so thy name the more

Might aught of beauty or of power command.

They trod the path of honour, never counting

The trials and the crosses by the way;

The blood-stained heights of sacrifice surmounting.

Bearing the torch lest you should go astray.

Oft did they stumble as they followed far

Some star within their visionary dreams.

Some new-found trail, some glorious avatar.

Some Holy-Grail with mystic rosy beams.

They reached their goal; they knew it not; night's awning

Dropped down in darkness on their wedry feet.

No watchman called them at the early dawning

Where still they rest beneath the growing wheat.

Bid them good-morrow, noble hearts and brave,

Who shrank not in the bitter strife and pain.

Saving their souls, their lives they freely gave

That glory in our land might dwell again.
